



September 1, 2009

Region Four
4600 Giant Springs Rd.
Great Falls, MT 59405
(406) 454-5840

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Region Four, has previously distributed a Draft Environmental Assessment for the proposed Glass Property Acquisition of 80 acres, located northeast of Denton, Montana and sharing a common boundary with the existing Beckman Wildlife Management Area (WMA). After reviewing the Draft Environmental Assessment, public comment, and public support FWP received for this proposal, I conclude that any potential impacts associated with the proposed alternative would not have a significant impact on the physical or human environment. With these considerations this Environmental Assessment becomes Final and is judged the appropriate level of analysis for the proposed action. An environmental impact statement is not required.

Based upon the Final Environmental Assessment, public comment and the public's desire to further expand the scope of the existing Beckman WMA, it is my decision to recommend the Department and the Fish, Wildlife and Parks Commission acquire the Glass Property and append it to the Beckman WMA, pending available funds.

Sincerely,

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Gary Bertellotti
Region Four Fish and Wildlife Supervisor
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks



ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT DECISION NOTICE
for the Glass Property Acquisition
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Region 4, Great Falls
September 2009

Preface

On August 1, 2009 Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) Region Four issued a draft environmental assessment (EA) and Management Plan for the proposed Glass Property Acquisition. A 31-day public comment period commenced at that time. The proposed Property is 80 acres located in the Judith River breaks, Fergus County, 12 miles northeast of Denton, Montana. It adjoins the existing Beckman Wildlife Management Area to the east, sharing one half mile of common boundary. It consists of steep-sided coulees with ridges that drain directly into the Judith River. The purchase price to FWP is \$80,000.

Proposed Action and Background

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks proposes the acquisition of 80 acres in fee title from the Mr. Ken Glass. The property would be incorporated into the existing Beckman Wildlife Management Area (BkmnWMA). The BkmnWMA's primary functions are to provide public access to resources representative of Central Montana and the Judith River Breaks ecosystem and to enhance existing wildlife populations. Currently, the opportunity to acquire the proposed Glass Property is considered a priority by FWP to further define and improve long-term habitat management on the BkmnWMA.

Project Proposal Terms

In proposing to acquire the Glass Property, FWP seeks to meet the following needs:

- Protect and enhance native grasslands, prairie-breaks and riparian habitat communities;
- Provide additional yearlong habitat for resident wildlife species;

- Manage wildlife and potential fisheries habitat in a sustainable manner to support priority fish and wildlife species;
- Expand public access to over 6,500 acres of continuous habitat now known as the Beckman WMA;
- Provide access for public hunting, wildlife viewing, hiking, and opportunity for other public recreational users;
- Protect wildlife habitat and potential fisheries resources from incompatible land uses or development and potential loss of public access to those resources;

Montana Environmental Policy Act

Fish, Wildlife & Parks is required by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) to assess potential impacts of a proposed action to the human and physical environment. The Montana Environmental Policy Act directs state agencies to ensure that the public is informed of and has the opportunity to participate in the decision making process. Fish, Wildlife & Parks prepared a draft EA, management plan and socio-economic analysis that identified the potential environmental and social impacts of this acquisition. Further, a Weed Inspection and Report was completed as required by state law.

Description of Proposed Action and Alternatives

Fish, Wildlife & Parks developed two viable alternatives to the proposed action.

No Action - Under the No Action Alternative, FWP would not take advantage of an opportunity to acquire fee title to the 80 acres under consideration as the Glass Property. The Glass Property would then continue in its unmanaged state as part of a larger, uncontrolled livestock grazing system. Or sale of the property could occur to other unidentified parties.

Fee Title Purchase – As described, outright acquisition of the Glass Property is the preferred alternative.

Environmental and Social Impacts Draft Environmental Impacts

Fish, Wildlife & Parks analyzed the environmental impacts of the proposed action and its fee title purchase recommended alternative. The draft EA did not identify any significant environmental or socio-economic impacts from the proposed acquisition. Fish, Wildlife & Parks will continue to pay taxes on the property. Fish, Wildlife & Parks does not anticipate any significant social or biologically deteriorating development of the property, but the land would be available for seasonal recreational use. If approved, FWP will expand its existing BkmmWMA management plan by incorporating the Glass acquisition.

Public Process and Comments

In compliance with the Montana Environmental Policy Act and state statute, a draft EA, management plan and socio-economic analysis were prepared and released on August

1, 2009, for a 31-day public review through 5:00 p.m., Monday, August 31, 2009. Fish, Wildlife & Parks made available copies of the draft EA and management plan to 31 individuals or entities by electronic means and an addition 13 paper copies were mailed to include all neighboring property owners, sportsman groups, and other interested parties. Notices were placed in local newspapers (Great Falls Tribune and the Lewistown News Argus) as well as one statewide news release and on the Fish, Wildlife & Parks web page. A public hearing was not deemed necessary nor requested. Copies of the draft EA, management plan and socio-economic analysis were made available at the FWP Region four headquarters in Great Falls and at the Lewistown Area Resource Office.

Public participation is a mechanism for agencies to consider substantive comments on a proposal. A total of 7 individuals submitted written comments. All 7 offered unqualified support for the proposal. No additional edits or questions were posed of the draft EA.